In Germany and Austria, queens and empresses have rarely risen to the historical heights and political prominence of Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603) or Catherine the Great of Russia (1729–1796) – albeit the latter was born Sophie Friederike Auguste, Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst. Maria Theresa (1717–1780) is the only empress ever to have ruled the Habsburg Empire, but, for the most part, female sovereigns in German-speaking Europe wielded power as royal consorts, not in their own right. In spite of such a relative dearth of historical models, women writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were drawn to the topic of female sovereignty. Christiane Benedikte Naubert (1752–1819), for example, penned several novels that deal with female royalty, including *Geschichte Emmas, Tochter Kayser Karls des Großen* (1785; ‘History of Emma, Daughter of Emperor Charlemagne’); *Eudoxia, Gemahltn Theodosius des Zweiten. Eine Geschichte des 5. Jahrhunderts* (1805; ‘Eudoxia, Wife of Theodosius the Second, a History from the 5. Century’); and *Amalgunde, Königin von Italien: Das Märchen von der Wunderquelle (eine Sage aus den Zeiten Theoderichs des Grossen)* (‘Amalgunde, Queen of Italy: The Fairy Tale of the Miraculous Fountain, a Legend from the Time of Theoderich the Great’). Naubert’s fictionalization of historical events continued in the nineteenth century in the works of the immensely prolific Luise Mühlbach (1814–1873). Mühlbach published numerous historical novels focused on female sovereigns, including *Königin*
Hortense, ein Napoleonisches Lebensbild (1856; ‘Queen Hortense, a Napoleonic Portrait of a Life’); Kaiser Joseph und Maria Theresia (1856–1857; ‘Emperor Joseph and Maria Theresia’); Kaiser Joseph und Marie Antoinette (1856–1857; ‘Emperor Joseph and Marie Antoinette’); Napoleon und Königin Louise (1858; ‘Napoleon and Queen Louise’); Kaiserin Josephine, Historischer Roman (1861; ‘Emperess Josephine, a Historical Novel’); Kaiserin Claudia, Prinzessin von Tirol, Historischer Roman (1867; ‘Emperor Claudia, Princess of Tyrol’); and Marie Antoinette und ihr Sohn (1867; ‘Marie Antoinette and her Son’). In all these texts, Naubert and Mühlbach clearly savour fantasies of female power even as they seek to address and negotiate the perceived incompatibility of femininity and sovereignty. In the following, I show that Naubert and Mühlbach draw on a well-worn repertoire of exculpatory tropes and strategies to soften, downplay and redefine their representations of women in power. But before I explicate these strategies, I would like to offer a brief survey of Western discourses of female sovereignty that will help to contextualize Naubert’s and Mühlbach’s representations of female power.

In spite of occasional support for individual female rulers, frequently necessitated by the complex interplay of dynastic power and gender, Western civilization is deeply marked by a long history of misogynist prejudices against women in positions of power. Animosity towards governing women is evident in Greek antiquity, in Renaissance England, in Enlightenment thought and in twenty-first-century politics. In 391 BCE, Aristophanes’s Assemblywomen, sometimes translated as Women in Power or Women in Parliament, ridiculed the idea that women could be in charge of government. The play features Athenian women who, wearing fake beards and men’s clothing, seek to institute a law that stipulates that people are free to have sex with anyone they desire as long as they first sleep with the old and ugly. While Aristophanes suggests that women’s unbridled sexuality makes them unfit to govern, the German philosopher Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770–1831) considers women rulers not simply ridiculous or unnatural, but argues that they pose a grave danger to the state: ‘Stehen Frauen an der Spitze der Regierung, so ist der Staat in Gefahr’. Hegel believes that male sovereigns have the best interest of the commonwealth at heart, whereas female rulers are bound to be whimsical and self-serving.

In light of this historically perceived incompatibility between qualities that are typically expected of a leader and those that are expected of women, women who aspired to positions of leadership had to devise strategies designed to navigate the sea of prejudices that kept them
powerless. One strategy to make female power more acceptable is to use it to promote the interests of men. As philosopher Kate Manne explains, ‘women’s power will be better tolerated when it’s wielded in service of patriarchal interests’. Another strategy employed to justify a woman’s claim to power relies on a recontextualization of traditional gender stereotypes. Thus, women have used the notion that they are endowed with an innate moral superiority to their advantage. For example, Jill Lepore has shown that in the United States ‘women entered public affairs by way of an evangelical religious revival that emphasized their moral superiority, becoming temperance reformers and abolitionists’. Similarly, many female sovereigns redefined female governance with an eye to the traditional female roles of mother and housewife, thus marshalling concepts of motherhood for political purposes. Elizabeth I of England, for example, successfully presented herself as both the Virgin Queen and a mother to her people. Most recently, Schramm has pointed out that Angela Merkel is often called Mutti Merkel (‘mama Merkel’). As the epithet Mutti Merkel shows, the conflation of female governance with motherhood persists until today. Last but not least, women who successfully secured positions of power frequently masculinized themselves in order to avoid potential conflicts between expectations inherent in the role of the sovereign and female gender stereotypes. Indeed, the masculinization of the female potentate is a well-worn tradition that goes back to antiquity. Gold notes that Hatshepsut, the fifth pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt ‘wore a false beard as part of her state costume’. Similarly, in her famous speech to the troops at Tilbury, Queen Elizabeth I proclaimed, ‘I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king’. In more recent times, such masculinization has assumed a more inconspicuous guise, manifesting in what classicist Mary Beard has called ‘the regulation trouser suits’. However, regardless of whether such masculinization is discreet or blatant, it shows that women are responding to the fact that ‘our mental, cultural template for a powerful person remains resolutely male’.

To be sure, the cultural and political context within which Naubert and Mühlbach wrote their novels defined governance as a male domain. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Naubert’s and Mühlbach’s fictionalized queens do not embrace power wholeheartedly. Frequently, the perceived incompatibility of women and sovereignty manifests in contradictory discourses and images so that moments in which the authors carve out space for female power are followed by passages that
propagate traditional and even reactionary gender roles. Thus, Naubert celebrates her heroine Amalgunde as a virtuous and successful queen but contrasts her with several female tyrants who crave power and are willing to violate every moral principle to hold on to it, suggesting that, while women may excel in a position of power, they must never seek it. In this way, Naubert offers a positive role model of a female sovereign while also denigrating female ambition as dangerous and immoral. Similarly, Naubert’s Boudicea is portrayed as a highly successful military leader but a hapless mother who foregoes personal happiness in order to save the fatherland. Much like Naubert, Luise Mühlbach sought to reconcile female sovereignty with traditional gender roles. Her voluminous historical novel Napoleon in Deutschland (‘Napoleon in Germany’) presents Queen Louise as an inspirational and aspirational figure. Mühlbach highlights Louise’s domesticity and idealizes her marriage and motherhood, but she also presents Louise as the spiritual and emotional centre of Prussian resistance to Napoleon. In creating a character whose power derives from her suffering, Mühlbach offers a positive representation of female sovereignty, but she also identifies female agency with sacrifice, pain and even death.

Christiane Benedikte Naubert’s Voadicea and Amalgunde

Female sovereigns were not the only women who masculinized themselves to avoid opprobrium; the same can be said about female authors. Benedikte Naubert (1752–1819), who published much of her work anonymously, is a case in point. Shawn C. Jarvis differentiates between two distinct periods in Naubert’s career. In the first period when Naubert’s identity was unknown, her works were well received and even admired for their erudition. In the second phase, after her identity was revealed in 1817, Naubert did not fare as well. Susanne Kord cites Naubert’s case when she suggests that ‘bei der Entdeckung des wahren Geschlechts der Autorin endet häufig ihre Karriere’. The fact that Naubert authored many historical novels may have exacerbated the perceived transgression. Marianne Henn points out that, while women were considered unfit to be authors in general, they were believed to be particularly ill equipped to deal with the genre of the historical novel, which requires academic research. And yet, Benedikte Naubert penned one-fifth of all German historical novels published between 1780 and 1788 (see Henn 287); thirty-six of her fifty-nine books were historical
novels, and she managed to cover all centuries from the fifth to the eighteenth.\textsuperscript{13} To be sure, Naubert’s historical fiction does not insist on a strict separation of history and literature but rather tends to pair historical facts with fantastical stories of magic and the supernatural.\textsuperscript{14} At the same time, Naubert is not indifferent to historical truth, but rather encourages her readers to think critically about the writing of history. Reitemeier demonstrates that Naubert at times deliberately changed the historical record in order to make her readers question established narratives: ‘Naubert verfälscht die überlieferte Geschichtsdarstellung. Sie füllt nicht nur erzählerisch die Lücken, die die Überlieferung läßt, sondern stellt die Überlieferung selbst als fehlerhaft dar’.\textsuperscript{15}

Although Naubert highlights women’s roles in history and frequently casts women as protagonists, several scholars have argued that her works promote traditional gender roles. Renate Möhrmann, for example, notes Naubert’s support for the institution of marriage regardless of the suffering it may cause.\textsuperscript{16} In her analysis of Naubert’s \textit{Barbara Blomberg, vorgebliche Maitresse Kaiser Karls des Fünften. Eine Originalgeschichte in zwei Theilen} (1790?; ‘Barbara Blomberg, Alleged Mistress of Emperor Charles the Fifth, an Original Story in Two Parts’), Maierhofer argues that Naubert either reduces historically powerful women to their private roles as sisters or wives and casts them as victims, or ignores them altogether.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, Julie Koser suggests that although Naubert’s works frequently feature cross-dressed heroines, her women warriors typically fight to ‘defend the same reactionary social structures which denied their agency and perpetuated their subordinate status’, thus recasting ‘the disorderly woman as female patriot’.\textsuperscript{18} Such attempts to de-emphasize female power are in line with Naubert’s self-representation as a wife and mother rather than as a writer.\textsuperscript{19}

While Maierhofer and Koser are right to point to strong conservative tendencies in Naubert’s representations of gender, I will focus on two novels whose conceptualizations of female sovereignty are marked by a great deal of ambiguity. I begin with an analysis of Naubert’s \textit{Velleda, ein Zauberroman, Voadicea und Velleda} (‘Velleda, a Novel of Magic, Voadicea and Velleda’), published in 1795, which combines the story of the British folk heroine Boudica or Boadicea with that of the Germanic prophetess Velleda. Boudica, whom Naubert calls Voadicea, was the Queen of the Celtic tribe of the Iceni, which she led in revolt against the Roman occupiers in 60 BCE. In his history of the Roman empire, Cassius Dio describes Boudica as a mighty queen:
A terrible disaster had taken place in Britain. Two cities had been sacked, eight myriads of Romans and of their allies had perished, and the island had been lost. Moreover, all this ruin was brought upon them by a woman, a fact which in itself caused them the greatest shame [...] But the person who most stirred their spirits and persuading them to fight the Romans, who was deemed worthy to stand at their head and to have the conduct of the entire war, was a British woman, Buduica of the royal family and possessed of greater judgment than often belongs to women [...] In person she was very tall, with a most sturdy figure and a piercing glance; her voice was harsh; a great mass of yellow hair fell below her waist and a large golden necklace clasped her throat.20

In spite of Boudicea’s formidable qualities, the uprising failed and she died either of illness, as Cassius Dio claims, or by her own hand, as Tacitus suggests.

Although Voadicea and Velleda are undoubtedly cast as the heroines of her story, Naubert begins her novel with the Iron King, ruler of the Iceni. The father of nine daughters, the Iron King is said to have reigned when the Romans first came to Britannia, which was then weakened by an internal division into competing principalities. Since the Romans were in the habit of abducting the children of their enemies and educating them in Rome, and since many of the king’s neighbours were willing slaves of the Romans and could not be relied upon for assistance, the Iron King sought to hide his daughters to prevent such a fate. Without consulting with his wife and even without letting his daughters take leave of their mother, he took them on a dangerous journey to the remote island of Mona where he placed them in the care of the mighty sorceress Velleda.

While the Iron King is left nameless (even though history has recorded his name, Prasutagus), his wife Voadicea is introduced as both a mighty heroine and a housewife: ‘Voadicea war damals noch nicht die Heldin, von welcher Freund und Feind zu sagen wußte; erst das Unglück machte sie groß. Damals lebte sie noch das stille Leben der Königinnen der Vorwelt, welches nicht viel von dem Leben guter gemeiner häuslichen Frauen verschieden war’.21 In endowing Voadicea with fame and majesty while characterizing her as a housewife like any other, the text introduces an ambiguity that continues to shape the representation of female sovereignty. Naubert grants Voadicea an elevated position, but then immediately downplays her royal standing with a reference to
the domestic realm. Thus, Voadicea is presented as a character whom female readers can admire and with whom they can identify.

Naubert continues to highlight the Queen’s domestic role when she criticizes the Iron King’s high-handed decision to remove his daughters without their mother’s permission. Faulting the king for his failure to consult with his wife, Naubert points to the innate rights of mothers. Although the fate of royal heirs is a political matter, any decision concerning her children ‘lag zu sehr in dem Gebiet der Königin, die auch Mutter war, als daß nach Recht und Billigkeit ihre Stimme hätte übergangen werden dürfen’ (Velleda 11).22 Tellingly, this passage de-emphasizes female sovereignty and suggests instead that Voadicea should have been consulted not as a queen, but as a mother. At the same time, the text shows that matters of state have ripple effects that reach into the domestic realm so that readers may well conclude that women should have a say in politics. Where royal offspring is concerned, the private is political. Moreover, while the King believes that ‘Eure Mutter kann euch nicht schützen, denn sie ist ein Weib’ (Velleda 14),23 readers may well assume that the warrior queen Voadicea would have been more than capable of protecting her daughters.

In identifying the rights of the Queen with those of the mother, the novel both promotes and rejects female power. This contradictory structure marks the entire text, which offers glimpses of female empowerment but struggles to sustain its progressive impetus. Tellingly, a few pages later, Naubert revises her initial insistence on female participation in the decision-making process, suggesting that the Iron King might well have confided in his wife if she had been more amenable. Now the text maintains that Voadicea brought her separation from her daughters on herself through her disagreeable ‘Eigensinn’ (Velleda 17; ‘stubbornness’). Here, female pliability is presented as a precondition for intimacy and happiness in the domestic domain. Conversely, if a woman is stubborn, her family (and the state) fall apart. It is important to note that such contradictions inform the entire novel. Moments in which Naubert seeks to carve out space for women’s agency are complemented by passages that propagate traditional and even reactionary gender roles.

Naubert relies on the trope of motherhood to illustrate the incompatibility of feminity and sovereignty. At first, the portrayal of Voadicea as a leader who possesses natural authority and acts with great competence would seem to defy traditional gender roles. Whenever Voadicea shows herself in public, her people grow silent in admiration.
Even those who oppose her stand in awe of her majesty when she appears in person (*Velleda* 20). Voadicea alone dares to confront the Romans, who are aghast at the sheer horror of a female warrior. When the Romans attack, Voadicea defends her country heroically and successfully, but she is an ‘unglückliche[ ], freudenloße[ ] Siegerin’ (‘unhappy, joyless victor’) who cannot enjoy her triumph: ‘der Name Königin, Siegerin, war für sie ein schlechter Ersatz für den süßen Zuruf Gattin und Mutter’ (*Velleda* 16).24 Forced to subordinate her longing for her daughters to the duties of empire, Voadicea wins the battle against the Romans but loses her family not once but twice. Naubert introduces a second plotline in which Voadicea finds her daughters only to lose them again, thus further illustrating the incompatibility of motherhood and sovereignty. Once she has conquered the Romans, Voadicea embarks on a search for her daughters. She persists even when she is abandoned by her guide, who considers her mission too dangerous. Steering her boat all by herself, she finally discovers the location of her daughters, but only the eldest is willing to leave with her while her other daughters choose to stay on the island with Velleda. Clearly, Naubert’s text insists that, for women, political success comes at the price of domestic happiness.

Once Voadicea has left with her oldest daughter, the focus of the novel turns to Velleda. In Tacitus’s *Histories*, Veleda is a Germanic prophetess who is said to have predicted the victory of the Batavians, a Germanic tribe situated in the Dutch Rhine delta, in their uprising against Rome in 69. When the revolt was defeated, Veleda became a Roman prisoner. Like Boudica, Veleda was endowed with great authority by her people:

This maiden of the tribe of the Bructeri enjoyed extensive authority, according to the ancient German custom, which regards many women as endowed with prophetic powers and, as the superstition grows, attributes divinity to them. At this time Veleda’s influence was at its height, since she had foretold the German success and the destruction of the legions.25

In her article on Naubert, Jarvis argues that *Velleda* ‘rewrites the patriarchal narrative’, citing the ‘creation of a female community outside traditional society […] and the rejection of patriarchal redemption’.26 Indeed, the Icanian princesses prefer Veleda’s ‘bewitchment to domestic entrapment’,27 and yet, I would argue that Velleda is not a feminist heroine but remains an ambiguous character. Much like Tacitus, Naubert introduces Velleda as a mighty sorceress and
prophetess of superhuman size and of Germanic origin: she ‘kam aus Germanien herüber, zum Heil dieses Landes’ (Velleda 13).28 The island she inhabits was once a site of human sacrifices, and Velleda herself is a shape-shifter. After the Romans ransacked her island, she assumed the form of an eagle and ate the flesh of a female corpse. But it is not only her cannibalism that casts a shadow on Velleda’s character. Throughout the text, it remains unclear if Velleda rescued the princesses or if she conspired to take them from their mother and keep them prisoner. After all, the Iron King entrusted his daughters to her care because she convinced him that his kingdom was doomed, his death imminent and his dynasty bound to end. Once she was in charge of the princesses, Velleda used magic to hide them from prying eyes and from their own mother.

When Voadicea found her daughters in spite of all the obstacles, all but one refuses to go with her, even though Velleda is absent and the time for rescue opportune. Here, the text is not clear if the daughters’ refusal is motivated by bewitchment and a form of Stockholm syndrome, or if they truly act in their own best interest. While the eldest daughter Bunduica argues that Velleda did them an injustice by depriving them of their liberty (Velleda 28), the youngest, who is also called Velleda, believes that joining their mother would imperil them.29 Neither party is vindicated by the events that follow this failed rescue attempt. On the one hand, the sisters who remained with Velleda came to regret their decision. Their hideout was discovered and all but two committed suicide. On the other hand, Voadicea and Bunduica did not fare much better. They were taken prisoner by the Romans, Voadicea took poison to end her own life and Bunduica died fighting (Velleda 31). Following the narrative of the historical Bouadicea, Naubert’s fictional universe offers no place for female sovereigns.

Interestingly, Voadicea’s capture by the Romans and Velleda’s death herald a transition from female sovereignty to male leadership. Once Bunduica left her siblings, their hiding spot was no longer safe and they relocated to the Orkney Islands. There, they were discovered by two Romans who are introduced as Flavius and Julius. Gradually, it is revealed that Flavius is the future Emperor Vespasianus while Julius is Agricola, the future governor of Brittania. Although the two Romans vowed to protect the sisters and promised never to take away their freedom, six of the sisters committed suicide rather than submit to their new overlords. Two, however, young Velleda and Voada, developed relationships with Flavius and Julius and aided their rise to greatness. Instead of holding
power themselves, Velleda and Voada whispered advice into the ears of male sovereigns. The text hints at the limitations of this model: reduced to giving counsel rather than executing decisions, young Velleda cannot prevent calamity when her words go unheeded. Moreover, Velleda and Voda’s position also requires that they renounce their sexuality. Tellingly, Velleda, who keeps her relationship to Titus strictly platonic, survives while Voada’s physical love affair with her protector is punished with an early death (Velleda 42).

Naubert’s Velleda poses more questions than it answers. Is Velleda Voadicea’s worst enemy because she deprives her of the bonds she treasures most? Or does Velleda support Voadicea’s fight by offering protection for what is most dear to the warrior queen? Is Velleda’s island an exemplary female community that is destroyed from within by Bunduica’s betrayal? Or is it a prison masked as paradise? Does young Velleda prefer an inglorious exercise of power that limits itself to whispering in the ears of male leaders to a courageous and open fight for her beliefs? Or does she take the long view, preserving her energy for a slow transformation rather than burning it up in one doomed battle? Naubert does not resolve these contradictions but rather ends her text with an embedded story that replicates these questions. Curiously, the novel concludes with a narrative about an Egyptian king that is introduced as the subject of one of Velleda’s favourite books. This story, entitled ‘Sam und Siuph—oder die Kinder des heiligen Stiers’ (Sam and Siuph—Or the Children of the Sacred Bull), pits the Egyptian king Sam against the Persian ruler. Neither one is presented as a moral figure. Sam is proud, haughty and hard; the Persian king is a cruel tyrant who does not lose any sleep over the deaths of thousands (Velleda 70). One can read this tale as an illustration of how the male will to gain power results in mutual destruction. But one can also read it as an educational treatise that again highlights the importance of female subservience and wifely duty. The tale hints at the possibility that the Persian king could have been reconciled if Nitetis, an Egyptian woman who was offered to him as a bride, had consented to marry him: ‘Laß ihn einen Tyrannen seyn, er ist ihr Gemahl, ihn zu verlassen, war Schande und Verbrechen für sie’ (Velleda 57),30 readers are told. Again, Naubert explicates on the corruption of male power and offers glimpses of a formidable female majesty even as she insists on female subordination and on the impossibility of female sovereignty.

The contradictions that plague Velleda are also evident in Naubert’s novel Amalgunde, Königin von Italien: Das Märchen von der Wunderquelle
(eine Sage aus den Zeiten Theoderichs des Grossen), published in 1786. Amalgunde is loosely based on historical events in the life of Theoderic’s daughter Amalasuntha, but is interwoven with a story of magical objects and dark prophesies. Throughout, Amalgunde, a much longer text than Velleda, goes out of its way to emphasize its heroine’s innate superiority. Tall and majestic, Amalgunde possesses ‘eine stille Würde’ (‘a quiet dignity’) that inspires awe wherever she goes.31 ‘Ihr Betragen so wohl als ihre Schönheit bestättigten ihr die Ehrfurcht, die man ihrem Stande schuldig war’ (Amalgunde 170).32 Born to be queen, Amalgunde refuses to be cowed into submission by anyone.33 When Amalgunde, who was brought up in a convent, is moved to the emperor’s court in Constantinople, she effortlessly asserts her position there. Even in her deepest humiliation when Amalgunde’s enemies have triumphed over her and she is sold as a slave, she commands respect through ‘das strafende Feuer ihrer Augen, die Ueberlegenheit die ihr die Tugend gab’ (Amalgunde 394).34 Her gaze alone terrifies her enemies so that ‘ein gebietender Blick, eine Thräne von ihr, vermögend war [...] zu entwafnen’ (Amalgunde 393).35 Indeed, even the stranger who buys her as a slave under the false name Sitta recognizes her inner majesty.

Along with Amalgunde’s innate majesty, the text also highlights her competence as a ruler and her natural right to occupy the throne. In Amalgunde, birthright trumps gender and the rights of the queen outweigh wifely duties. Because she is born to the throne, Amalgunde felt ‘ein königliches Herz in sich, das sie das Leben auf dem Thron als ihre eigentliche Sphäre ansehen ließ’ (Amalgunde 308).36 Consequently, she does not shy away from power but rather relishes the prospect of exerting influence in the public domain: ‘schmeichelte mir es, dereinst in eine Sphäre zu kommen, in welcher das Glück von tausenden in meiner Gewalt seyn sollte’ (Amalgunde 307).37 Once Amalgunde has ascended to the throne, she is hailed as ‘Mutter des Volks’ (Amalgunde 483; ‘mother of the people’) and enjoys the admiration of her people. Indeed, the narrator declares that such admiration is one of the greatest joys in life (Amalgunde 484). Amalgunde proves herself as a sovereign when the Gauls and Visigoths attack Italy after her father’s death. Since her husband is absent and her son too weak, Amalgunde commands her army herself (Amalgunde 549).

Although Naubert goes to great lengths to highlight Amalgunde’s majesty, courage and competence, she also introduces a counter-discourse that casts Amalgunde as an obedient daughter and wife. The narrator notes that Amalgunde willingly obeys her beloved husband
Artemidor, commenting that many women might resent such an assertion of authority whereas Amalgunde ‘sah es gern in dem, den sie liebte, einen strengen Beurtheiler ihrer Handlungen, einen Führer zu finden, der, wo sie irrte, im Stande war, sie auf bessere Wege zu leiten’ (Amalgunde 214). Similarly, when Amalgunde, who lives far from her father’s court, falsely believes that she has a brother who will inherit the crown, she happily cedes her rights (Amalgunde 452). Acutely aware of the conflict between the obedience imposed on the wife and daughter and the sovereignty expected of a queen, Naubert consistently advocates for the primacy of the former over the latter. As a young girl, Amalgunde learned of a prophesy that she would once wear a crown but trade it for a wreath of flowers (Amalgunde 379), and this is indeed her path. When Theodat conquers her empire, Amalgunde does not lament the loss of power but rather wishes only to be reunited with her husband Artemidor and her adopted son Gratian (Amalgunde 644). No longer a queen, Amalgunde finds pleasure in ‘Freundschaft, Liebe, Üeberfluß, gemäßigte Hoheit, und fast ewige Jugend und Schönheit’ (Amalgunde 676).

It would seem that Velleda devotes the bulk of its narrative energy to the representation of thwarted motherly love whereas Amalgunde revels in the splendour of female majesty. And yet, Amalgunde’s representation of female sovereignty is equally problematic; it merely follows a different rationale. Here, Naubert does not foreground the incompatibility of motherhood and power – although Amalgunde too is alienated from her biological child and finds happiness only with her adopted son. Instead, Naubert chooses to contrast one ideal woman sovereign with several female figures who illustrate the perils of female governance. Indeed, the evil of female rule is embodied not by one but by five women. At the beginning of the text, the reader is introduced to Ariadne, wife of Zeno, the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, and her mother Irene. Ariadne is of low birth: her mother was an actress before she and her daughter rose to power (Amalgunde 23, 28). Both women are portrayed as power-hungry, greedy and debauched. They are ‘lasterhaft, das Leben bey Hofe zügellos und ausschweifend’ (Amalgunde 85). Ariadne hates Amalgunde because she is virtuous and because of her sexual jealousy; the valiant Theokrit, who did not succumb to Ariadne’s attempts to seduce him, falls for Amalgunde (Amalgunde 330). Her evil nature is confirmed when she is revealed as a murderess responsible for the deaths of her first husband Zeno and her second husband Anastasius.

Among Irene’s many illegitimate children is Theodora (Amalgunde 29, 84), who rivals her sister and mother in depravity. In their youth,
Amalgunde and Theodore were friends, but, growing up, Theodore embarked on a path of corruption and deception and came to resent her former friend’s superior goodness and natural majesty. Naubert contrasts ‘die Ehrfurcht, die der grössere Theil des Volks für Theoderichs Tochter, und die Verachtung, die er gegen die Schauspielerin Theodore bezeugte’ (Amalgunde 235). When Theodora’s intrigues result in her ascension to the throne of the Eastern Roman Empire, she uses her power ‘die Länder mit Blut und Thränen zu überschwemmen’ (Amalgunde 599; ‘to flood the countries with blood and tears’). During Theodora’s reign, many of her enemies die sudden and mysterious deaths (Amalgunde 599), and it is rumoured that she killed her own mother Irene. Theodora is repeatedly described as a monster, a half-hyena, half-wolf with a bloody mouth (Amalgunde 105). And yet, she is so skilled in the art of deception that her husband and many writers of history considered her virtuous (Amalgunde 678).

While Ariadne, Irene and Theodora embody the horror of female rule in the Eastern Roman Empire, Klotilde and Gondeberta stand for female corruption and greed in the Western Roman Empire. Naubert portrays Klotilde, the wife of Theoderich, King of the Ostrogoths and ruler of Italy, as a scheming woman who dominates her husband, turns him against his trusted advisors and throws her enemies in prison (Amalgunde 425–426). Like Ariadne, Klotilde is an adulteress whose actions are motivated by sexual jealousy. While Amalgunde triumphs over Ariadne, Irene, Theodora and Klotilde, she is eventually defeated by the clandestine machinations of Theoderich’s sister Gondeberta, who manages to rob Amalgunde of her empire and instal her son Theodat on her throne (Amalgunde 493). As this brief survey shows, Amalgunde relativizes the representation of one ideal woman ruler by contrasting it with a proliferation of debauched and power-hungry female sovereigns. Readers may well conclude that the benefits to be derived from a virtuous queen such as Amalgunde are dwarved by the danger of anointing an Ariadne, Irene, Theodora, Klotilde or Gondeberta. In both Velleda and Amalgunde, femininity and sovereignty are constructed as incompatible.

Luise Mühlbach

Luise Mühlbach (1814–1873), whose real name was Clara Mundt, was an immensely prolific author who published 290 novels. She was married to the German critic and novelist Theodor Mundt, who was
known for his support for the emancipation of women. Like Mundt’s works, Mühlbach’s early works are informed by the spirit of *Junges Deutschland*, a group of liberal writers who opposed the reactionary politics of the restoration era. In these early novels, Mühlbach spoke out against child labour, prostitution and poverty and generally embraced progressive ideas, even if she did not offer a fully developed political programme and often maintained contradictory positions. After 1848, however, Mühlbach’s politics changed. The former progressive became a ‘Hagiographin des Absolutismus’ (hagiograph of absolutism) and ‘Hauptlieferantin der Leihbibliotheken’ (main supplier of lending libraries). In his analysis of historical novels by women writers, Brent O. Petersen argues that ‘women were usually relegated to supporting roles in nineteenth-century historical fiction’; all too often, Petersen notes, ‘the fatherland has no use for women’. If Petersen’s assessment describes the vast majority of historical novels, Mühlbach’s novels represent an exception. Although Mühlbach’s post-1848 texts cannot be characterized as emancipatory, they feature female actors in prominent roles. As I will show, Mühlbach’s Napoleon novels cast Queen Louise as the French emperor’s most formidable antagonist; she is the only one who can save Prussia. At the same time, however, Louise’s heroism derives from her sacrifice. In this, Mühlbach follows a traditional pattern that identifies female heroism with victimization.

Luise Mühlbach published *Napoleon in Deutschland* (‘Napoleon in Germany’) in 1858 and 1859. The title refers not to one book, but to an epic series of sixteen novels divided into four sections. The first section is entitled *Rastatt und Jena* (‘Rastatt and Jena’), the second *Napoleon und Königin Louise* (‘Napoleon and Queen Louise’), the third *Napoleon und Blücher* (‘Napoleon and Blücher’) and the last *Napoleon und der Wiener Congress* (‘Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna’). Since each book is between 300 and 400 pages long, the entire work amounts to over 5,000 pages. While Mühlbach draws on historical research, includes citations and even provides footnotes with bibliographic references, she also fictionalizes the historical events to suit her ideological agenda. In the following, I focus on the second section of *Napoleon in Deutschland*, *Napoleon und Königin Louise*, in which the Prussian Queen emerges as Napoleon’s most determined opponent and as Prussia’s last hope. Throughout, *Napoleon und Königin Louise* is infused with fervent nationalism and monarchism; patriotism is defined as hatred of the French and as support for the Prussian King and Queen, who are united with their
subjects through an insoluble bond of love. Because the monarchy is identified with the nation, Mühlbach’s texts sideline contemporary movements for democratization and argue instead that the Prussian monarch stands for freedom whereas Napoleon, a foreigner, embodies tyranny: ‘ein Volk seinem angestammten Herrscherhause entreißen [...] heißt es in Ketten schlagen’.\(^{50}\) Repeatedly, readers are informed that Prussia was not defeated on the battlefield but succumbed to betrayal and cowardice. Indeed, Mühlbach offers up a stab-in-the-back legend for the Napoleonic wars: ‘Treubruch und Verrath überall [...] nicht blos die Hand des Sieges und Eroberers hatte ihren Fall herbeigeführt, sondern die eigene Zaghaftigkeit, der eigene Schrecken’ (II: 91).\(^{51}\) To the Prussian patriot, peace is a dirty word because it involves surrender to Napoleon, which must be avoided at all cost. Instead of peace, the novel presents honour as the ultimate value that should rightly trump all other concerns.

Although *Napoleon und Königin Louise* features a large cast of characters who resist the French occupation of German lands, including Major Ferdinand von Schill, Freiherr vom und zum Stein and Karl August von Hardenberg, Mühlbach presents Queen Louise as the spiritual centre of the German resistance and as Napoleon’s most powerful antagonist. Repeatedly, King Frederick Wilhelm III of Prussia, Louise’s husband, is characterized as weak. Readers learn that the King’s courage has been broken and that he is now ‘unentschlossen, verzagt, und kleinmütig’ (IV: 74).\(^{52}\) He is easily swayed by his advisors (III: 41) and even wants to renounce his throne, but he is persuaded by the Queen to persevere (III: 168). Throughout, the Queen is presented as the King’s lifeline and most important support; she is ‘die Säule, an welche er sich lehnen wollte, um nicht zusammen zu sinken’ (II: 29).\(^{53}\) Vom Stein calls Louise the ‘Genius Preußens’ (III: 103; Prussia’s genius) and reminds her that it is her calling to comfort and encourage those who lost hope. ‘Ohne Louise ist Preußen, ist der König verloren’ (III: 100),\(^{54}\) vom Stein insists. Czar Alexander echoes these sentiments when he encourages Louise’s participation in the Congress of Tilsit, claiming that ‘sie allein vermag jetzt noch für Preußen zu wirken [...] die Königin ist jetzt unsere letzte Hoffnung’ (II: 294).\(^{55}\) Clearly, Mühlbach presents Queen Louise as the linchpin of the German resistance to the French.

The hopes placed in Louise are borne out at the end of the second volume when Napoleon and Louise meet face to face. Not even Napoleon is able to resist Louise’s superior moral standing and her eloquence (‘Macht der Sprache’, III: 119) in matters of the fatherland. Through
sheer willpower and poise, Louise forces Napoleon into submission: ‘Die Königin schleuderte auf ihn einen Blick voll so stolzer Hoheit, so imposanter Verachtung, daß Napoleon unwillkürlich erbebte und sein Auge sich vor dem ihren fast beschämt zu Boden senkte’ (II: 343). Smitten with Louise, Napoleon promises to give in to her demands, but changes his mind once the meeting is over and he is no longer spellbound by her charismatic presence. He does, however, continue to think of Louise as the epicentre of the Prussian resistance: ‘Königin Louise haßt mich, sie wird niemals aufhören, gegen mich zu intrigieren’ (III: 290).

Queen Louise not only stands up to Napoleon, she also inspires resistance in others. Here too, her role is predominantly that of a symbol, not an agent, and her power derives from her pain. At the beginning of the first volume, readers are told that Louise’s tears will awaken Germany’s saviours and call forth help from the sky (I: 38). Louise is the guiding light of the ‘Königin-Dragoner’ (IV: 57; ‘Queen-Dragoons’) and is particularly dear to Major Ferdinand von Schill, who led a rebellion against the French that ended with his death in the Battle of Stralsund. Mühlbach emphasizes repeatedly that Schill’s actions are motivated by his deep love for his Queen: ‘Ihr, dem Genius Preußens, dem Stern meines Lebens! Für Sie mein Blut, mein Leben, meine Kraft’ (IV 68). Louise gently nurtures and encourages these feelings, for example, by gifting Schill with a briefcase that she made herself (IV 69), and her ability to rally the troops against the foreign tyrant is recognized by Napoleon himself. Indeed, Louise’s followers are so passionately committed that they are willing to die for the fatherland. Tellingly, the first volume of Napoleon und Königin Louise opens with a survivor of the Battle of Jena and Auerstaedt, who blesses the Queen with his dying breath: ‘der hier einsam stirbt, und dich segnet’ (I: 13). Later in the same volume, Mühlbach introduces a scene that illustrates the Queen’s own willingness to die for the cause. After Prussia’s catastrophic loss at Jena and Auerstaedt, the Queen, who is pursued by French chasseurs, holds a dagger at the ready to avoid being captured alive should she fail to reach the city of Küstrin (I: 146). Later, Louise declares forcefully that she would rather be shot, lie underneath the rubble of the throne or flee as a nameless beggar to Russia than sign a treaty with France (II: 34). Importantly, these scenes not only highlight Louise’s passion and power, but prioritize the needs of the country over those of her family. In this sense, one might indeed claim that Mühlbach ‘bedient sich […] des nationalen Diskurses, um die Erweiterung weiblicher
Handlungsspielräume zu rechtfertigen’. At the same time, however, this expanded realm of female agency remains identified with sacrifice, pain and even death.

Throughout Napoleon in Deutschland, Louise is portrayed as the subject of quasi-religious adulation. She is the ‘Engel des Unglück und der Schmerzen’ (I: 86). When she arrives in Berlin after Prussia’s defeat at Jena, the people spontaneously fall to their knees in adoration: ‘wir Alle beten die Königin wie unsere Heilige an’ (I: 327). Louise is likened to a Vestal Virgin and even to Jesus himself when she exclaims, ‘Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen’ (II: 170; ‘my God, my God, why didst thou forsake me’). Most often, however, Louise is associated with Mary, mother of Jesus. In a passage evocative of liturgical descriptions of Mary, Louise is characterized as a ‘jungfräuliche Madonna’ who ‘neigte [...] ihr edles, schmerzensreiches Antlitz zu mir […] in ihrer himmlischen Schön’ (IV: 70). Like Mary, Louise is a mater dolorosa, a lady of sorrows and a female martyr (II: 169), who suffers deeply for her fatherland. Napoleon und Königin Louise is filled with scenes in which Louise is crying alone in her room, bravely hiding her tears and her pain from her husband, her children and her people whom she does not want to trouble with her sorrows (I: 90; I: 89). And yet, her suffering, caused by Napoleon’s tyranny, is of such magnitude that it ultimately leads to her death. When she feels her end approaching, Louise accuses Napoleon, who ‘hat den Dolch in mein Herz gestoßen, an dem es verbluten wird’ (IV 281). Readers are told that, though Louise’s body succumbs to the strain, her spirit remains undefeated (II: 156). By turning Louise into an inspirational figure of sorrow, Mühlbach’s novels redefine weakness as strength. In creating a character whose power derives from her suffering, Mühlbach manages to reconcile female sovereignty with traditional gender roles, but only by portraying a heroine whose resistance will result in her death.

Louise’s idolization as a mater dolorosa is paired with an emphasis on her simple tastes and modest qualities. The text goes out of its way to tell readers that Louise does not need or miss the splendour of the court and would have happily led a quiet and simple life if God had not chosen to make her husband king (I: 110). Again and again, readers are reminded that Louise is not attached to luxuries but rather feels rich because she is blessed with the love of her husband, her children and her people (III: 158 and 164). When Prussia is under severe financial strain, the Queen immediately offers to reduce her personal expenses and lead an ‘einfaches, prunkloses Dasein’ (II: 206; ‘simple, unostentatious life’).
Indeed, Louise’s insistence on downsizing her household is portrayed as the only occasion when the Queen is willing to defy her husband’s wishes (III: 109). She does not hesitate to sell her personal jewels to fill the coffers of the fatherland and to make sure that the king can pay the pensions he owes (III: 114). Mühlbach even shows the parsimonious Queen secretly mending her dress (III: 156). Clearly, readers are meant to feel for a Queen who has been reduced to such penury even as they are told that the Queen herself remained in good spirits. Mühlbach further emphasizes the Queen’s frugality and aversion to luxury by including an anecdote in which a young Louise meets Goethe’s mother and eats an omelette at her house. For dessert, Princess Louise asks to be allowed to pump water (III: 189). Through these vignettes of frugality, Louise is cast as a patriot and a prudent housewife. Thus, Mühlbach de-emphasizes Louise’s sovereignty while highlighting her domestic qualities.

Throughout *Napoleon und Königin Louise*, Mühlbach is careful to balance the Queen's public role with a portrait of Louise as an exemplary mother, wife and daughter. Louise’s political activities are presented as a sacrifice that is demanded by turbulent times and by the dire situation of the fatherland but that runs counter to her true inclinations. When Louise is expected to meet with Napoleon to plead for a better peace treaty for Prussia, her lady-in-waiting is appalled at the thought that ‘meine edle, unnahbare Königin plötzlich von ihrer idealen Höhe herabsteigen soll, um sich in die irdischen, kleinlichen Dinge der Politik zu mischen’ (II: 301). The Queen, however, reassures her, stating that she is ‘used to sacrifice’ (II: 302). At the same time, while the text never waivers from its representation of the Queen’s public role as one of sacrifice, it also argues that Louise’s suffering for the fatherland has earned her the right to participate in political deliberations. Tellingly, the Queen herself does not demand a right to influence political decisions: ‘Es ziemt mir nicht, meinem weisen und einsichtsvollen König einen Rath ertheilen zu wollen’ (II: 39). Instead, it is the King who pleads for including Louise in political deliberations: ‘Zudem hat die Königin alle Gefahren und alles Ungemach bis hierher Redlich mit uns getheilt, es ist daher auch wohl billig, wenn sie auch Theil nehmen möchte an unseren Berathungen und Plänen’ (14). In these moments, Mühlbach comes closest to endowing Louise with political agency, but even here agency and suffering are intimately connected and the Queen’s power is presented as a gift from her husband.
It bears mentioning that neither Naubert nor Mühlbach had experienced the reign of a queen first-hand. Naubert, who was born in Leipzig and later moved to Naumburg, witnessed many male rulers and a small number of female regents who governed various parts of Saxony effectively until their sons reached maturity. Mühlbach, a denizen of Berlin, lived through the reigns of Frederick Wilhelm III, Frederick Wilhelm IV and William I. Since neither had experienced a woman who laid claim to the throne in her own right, it is hardly surprising that they employ a variety of strategies to minimize the transgression inherent in a female aspiration to sovereignty. They go to great lengths to emphasize their heroines’ preference for the domestic realm and their willingness to obey their husbands and fathers. And both ultimately represent motherhood and governance as incompatible: Voadicea prioritizes the needs of the fatherland over the desire to be reunited with her daughters; Amalgunde defends her empire while leaving her corrupted and weak son behind; Mühlbach’s Louise would rather die for the fatherland than surrender and remain alive for her children. Although both Amalgunde and Louise are presented as positive role models, such idolization does not imply that female sovereignty is represented as unproblematic. Rather, while Naubert highlights the dangers that follow if women occupy positions of power by pairing her exemplary queen with debauched empresses, Mühlbach justifies her heroine’s political role by casting it as a sacrifice; Louise gains agency through suffering and death. Naubert and Mühlbach present ambiguous images of royal housewives and female tyrants, but they do not offer a positive revaluation of female sovereignty.

Notes

1 This survey draws on material discussed in the introduction to the edited collection Realities and Fantasies of German Female Leadership: From Maria Antonia of Saxony to Angela Merkel (Rochester: Camden House, 2019) that I co-authored with Patricia Simpson. Realities and Fantasies of German Female Leadership also offers information and literature on the topic that exceeds the scope of this article.


15 ‘Naubert falsifies the transmitted representation of history. She not only narratively fills lacunae that have come down to us in the tradition but rather marks the tradition itself as erroneous.’ Frauke Reitemeier, ‘Nationale Unterschiede? Sophia Lee und Benedikte Naubert’, in


21 ‘Voadicea was not then the heroine who was known to friend and foe; it was misfortune that made her great. Then she still lived the quiet life of queens of the old world which was not too different from the life of good common housewives’. Christiane Benedikte Naubert, Velleda (San Bernadino: E-artnow, 2018), p. 11. All further references appear in the text as Velleda and page number.

22 ‘was too much within the domain of the queen who was also a mother, and right and equity demand that her voice should not have been ignored’.

23 ‘your mother cannot protect you for she is a woman’.

24 ‘the name queen, victor was a poor substitute for the sweet epithet wife and mother’.


27 Jarvis, p. 201.

28 ‘she came from Germania for the welfare of this country’.
Interestingly, the narrator criticizes princess Velleda, commenting that ‘eine junge Person in dem Lehrton sprechen zu hören, wie hier die kleine Velleda sprach, ist unangenehm, weil es unnatürlich ist’, p. 30.

‘Let him be a tyrant, he is her husband, to leave him was shame and crime for her’.


‘her behaviour as well as her beauty confirmed the awe that was owed to her social class’.

‘Ich lass mich weder schrecken noch mir Bedingungen vorschreiben, erwiederte die Prinzeßin, ich selbst lege dir welche vor’ (*Amalgunde* 139; ‘I will neither be frightened nor will anyone dictate conditions to me, responded the princess, rather, I myself will present conditions’).

‘the punishing fire of her eyes, the superiority given to her by her virtue’.

‘one commanding glance, one of her tears, had the power to disarm’.

‘a royal heart within herself that makes her look on life on the throne as her true sphere’

‘it flattered me to come to a sphere one day in which the happiness of thousands would be in my power’

‘enjoyed finding in him whom she loved a strict arbitor of her actions, a leader who, when she erred, was capable of pointing her toward a better path’.

It should be noted that, at times, Naubert cleverly plays the duties of the wife against those of the daughter and exploits this conflict to carve out spaces of female agency. Thus, Amalgunde ‘mußte aus Ehrfurcht gegen den Willen des Vaters […] es sich gefallen lassen, dessen Königin zu heißen, den sie, nach der Weise der Frauen aus der Vorwelt, für ihren Herrn und Gebieter hielt’, p. 532.

‘friendship, love, bounty, moderate majesty, and almost eternal youth and beauty’.

‘debauched; life at court unrestrained and excessive’.

‘the respect that the majority of the people had for Theoderich’s daughter and the contempt in which it held the actress Theodore’

Many of her works, including *Napoleon and the Queen of Prussia* (1868), were translated into English but often in abridged form. See Birte Förster, *Der Königin Luise-Mythos: Mediengeschichte des ’Idealbilds deutscher Weiblichkeit’ 1860-1960* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011), p. 65.
45 Möhrmann calls Mühlbach a true representative of her era in which ‘das Nebeneinander von revolutionären und reaktionären Elementen geradezu strukturbildend war’ (‘the juxtaposition of revolutionary and reactionary elements was systemic’). See Möhrmann, Die andere Frau, p. 66.
46 Möhrmann, Die andere Frau, pp. 151–152.
48 ‘In Mühlbachs Romanen herrscht die permanente Aktion. Und zwar handeln alle’ (Möhrmann, Die andere Frau, 62).
50 ‘to tear a people from its ancestral dynasty […] is to enslave it’. Luise Mühlbach, Napoleon in Deutschland. Zweite Abtheilung. Napoleon und Königin Louise, 4 vols. (Berlin: Otto Janke, 1858), II: p. 344. Further references appear in the text with volume and page number.
51 ‘Breach of faith and treason everywhere […] not only the hand of the victor and conqueror had led to their downfall but also their own hesitation and terror’. See also ‘Muthlosigkeit und Schwäche vielmehr als das Glück unserer Feinde haben uns unterjocht’ (III: 31).
52 ‘indecisive, despondent and meek’.
53 ‘the pillar he wanted to lean on so as not to collapse’; ‘Gott hat mir in dir einen Engel gegeben, der mein Herz erfrischen und meine Seele entflammen soll mit dem rechten Muth’ (III: 172).
54 ‘without Louise Prussia is, the King is lost.’
55 ‘she alone is now able to work for Prussia […] the queen is now our last hope’.
56 ‘the queen hurled at him a look of such proud majesty, so imposing a contempt that Napoleon trembled involuntarily and lowered his eye to the ground, almost ashamed’.
57 ‘Queen Louise hates me, she will never stop spinning intrigues against me’ (see also I: 241).
‘you, the genius of Prussia, star of my life! For you my blood, my life, my strength’.

‘he who dies lonely here, and blesses you’.


‘angel of misfortune and sorrows’.

‘we all worship the queen as our saint’.

‘virginal Madonna [...] bowed her noble, sorrowful countenance to me [...] in her heavenly beauty’.

‘has thrust the dagger into my heart that will make it bleed to death’.

‘my noble, untouchable queen should suddenly descend from her ideal height to mingle with the earthly, petty things of politics’.

‘it is not fitting for me to give my advice to my wise and insightful king’.

‘besides, the queen has honestly shared all dangers and all misfortune with us so far, therefore it is only right if she should want to take part in our counsel and plans’.